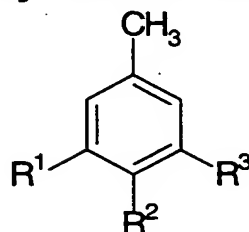


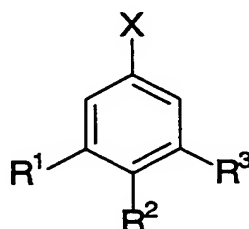
We claim:

1. A process for preparing toluene derivatives of the formula I,



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where  $R^1$ ,  $R^2$  and  $R^3$  independently of one another are hydroxyl or  $C_1$ - $C_6$ -alkoxy, by hydrogenating benzaldehydes and/or benzyl alcohols of the formula II,



IIa: X= CHO

X= CH[OC<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>6</sub>-alkyl]<sub>2</sub>IIb: X= CH<sub>2</sub>-OHX = CH<sub>2</sub>OC<sub>1</sub>-C<sub>6</sub>-alkyl

with hydrogen in the presence of a catalyst, which comprises the catalyst having the following composition:

- (a) at least one metal and/or at least one oxide, hydroxide or salt of a metal selected from the group consisting of cobalt, nickel and copper;
- (b) from 0 to 50% by weight of one or more metals and/or one or more oxides, hydroxides or salts of a metal selected from the group consisting of platinum, rhodium, iron, silver, molybdenum, tungsten, manganese, rhenium, zinc, cadmium, lead, aluminum, zirconium, tin, phosphorus, silicon, arsenic, antimony, bismuth, titanium and rare earth metals, and
- (c) from 0 to 5% by weight of an alkali metal oxide or alkaline earth metal oxide, alkali metal hydroxide or alkaline earth metal hydroxide, or alkali metal salt or alkaline earth metal salt,

where the sum of the components (a) to (c), provided that a support is not additionally used, is 100% by weight.

2. A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein the component (a) makes up from 40 to 99% by weight of the sum of the components (a) to (c).

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3. A process as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein the component (b) makes up from 1 to 40% by weight of the sum of the components (a) to (c).
- 5 4. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 3, wherein the component (c) makes up from 0.05 to 5% by weight of the sum of the components (a) to (c).
- 10 5. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 4, wherein the hydrogenation is carried out in a solvent.
6. A process as claimed in claim 5, wherein the solvent is an ether, an alkylbenzene, water or alcohol or a mixture thereof.
- 15 7. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 4, wherein the hydrogenation is carried out in the gas phase.
- 20 8. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 4, wherein the hydrogenation is carried out in the melt of compound II.
9. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 4, wherein the hydrogenation is carried out at pressures of from 20 to 250 bar and at temperatures of from 100 to 260°C.
- 25 10. A process as claimed in claims 1 to 9 for preparing 3,4,5-trimethoxytoluene.

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